This book describes how regional characteristics of places are shown in fifty-two movies, with the written narrative provided by 31 members of New Field Historical Geography (Yagairekishichirigaku Kenkyuukai). Though books about how movies can be used for history education in Japan are so numerous, as the writer points out in the introduction, the concept of interpreting a movie in terms of the geographical viewpoint is very novel. In addition, scenes and characters taken from these movies provide an important picture of a specific place and its local daily workings. This is interesting not only to geographers who focus on keywords such as place, space, and region but to a wide variety of readers.

This book consists of five chapters. Chapters 1 through 3 handle foreign settings. Specifically, chapter 1 gives examples from Asia and Africa, chapter 2 gives European examples, and North and South American and Oceanic examples are given in chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 give Japanese examples. In particular, chapter 4 describes the central part of Japan from the Tohoku district, and chapter 5 describes southwest Japan. I explain below the contents of each chapter. The first, four pages are devoted to the description of each movie, and include basic information, a regional description, concrete data, and a photograph.

In chapter 1, movies set in central cities of East Asia, such as Seoul and Beijing, are discussed. For example, the author explains the relationship between development and the environmental problems of Seoul using a movie that is staged on the Han River of Seoul. The author mentions the family love that is the theme of the movie and indicates the strength of the Confucian influence in Korea. This approach stimulates important thoughts about national culture and identity. A movie that was set in Beijing illustrates thirty years in the life of a family whose fate was controlled by the Cultural Revolution and the Economic Opening. The author explains the change of urban space in Beijing by looking at the life, people, and soundscape found in the movie. The author also discusses areas such as the Dunhuang cave temples and the Mongol Plateau in addition to the city in terms of ridding of disbalance of place.

The same pattern is followed in all chapters. Chapter 2 discusses movies set in Europe. The author examines Brassed Off, which is set in a coal mining town in Britain. This movie shows the relationship between the energy situation and laborers’ dissatisfaction with Britain and the beginnings of the Thatcher government and provides a good example of the deep relationship between industry and politics. The movies considered range from a classic like The Sound of Music to the new movie, The Da Vinci Code. In this way, generational differences in readers’ appreciation of movies are acknowledged.

In chapter 3, the discovery of a continent by Columbus and the journey of a British ship that carried 1,000 breadfruit seedlings to the West Indies from Tahiti are looked at, and the routes taken on those trips are illustrated. Concrete data such as change in the deforestation area of the Amazon basin is used in their explanation, and this enables readers to understand the real situation clearly.

Photographs by the author are used for explanation in many chapters including Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 that focuses on the stage of Japan. This gives a concrete image to those readers who have not seen the movies. This book considers many movies and creates images of places from the past to the present by explaining the story lines using the data and the photographs. This is a geographer’s device that has not been seen in similar books.

In particular, the point that I find important is the variety of uses of this book. The book enables readers to understand the local characteristics and history of a place while also enjoying the content of the movie. For example, although The Wonderful Adventures of Nils (Nirusu no fushigina tabi) illustrates that Swedish geographical characteristics can be understood by readers through a book (Murayama 2005), I think that there is a similar effect in this book too. Therefore, I think that
it can be used as a teaching tool in geography education and social studies education in secondary schools. In fact, Ida (2002) and Ida (2007) suggest that teaching materials of the geography education include movies such as Railroad Man (Poppoya) and Twenty-Four Eyes (Nijū-shi no Hitomi).

In addition, I think that this book can be used as a teaching tool for the study of tourism at universities. Recently, in tourism study, the phrase “media-induced tourism” has been used to describe a phenomenon that occurs when a place that appears in a TV drama or a movie subsequently attracts many tourists (Suzuki 2009). This book demonstrates an indivisible relationship between movies and their locations, and I think that it has value as a text for its explanation of the media-induced tourism phenomenon. For example, Udon, which refers to the Sanuki udon (wheat noodle) that is a local specialty of Kagawa Prefecture, will possibly draw tourists to and improve the popularity of that region and its cuisine, and so it offers a fine example of media-induced tourism and food tourism (Kikuchi, 2008).

The splendor and potential of this book need not be elaborated on, but one final point remains to be made regarding the need for a concluding chapter that demonstrates how this book may be used practically. If the author had included such a chapter, it could have highlighted the general purpose and practical significance of the book in the reader’s eyes. In any case, this book is a milestone that discusses the depth of the relationship between geography and the view of the world presented in movies. Therefore, I think that it is suitable and necessary reading for everyone who is interested in geography and geography education. At the same time, I hope that readers who are unconcerned about geography will get an opportunity to realize the relationship between movies and their locations by reading this book. I expect it to advance the study of the relationship between pictures and places and the study of media-induced tourism, and it adds to the teaching materials used in geography education.

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